"Maternal Impressions"

Disability Memoirs in Socialist Poland

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses disability memoirs written by mothers of disabled sons during state socialism in Poland. It recovers an often forgotten experience of living socialism as a mother of a disabled child and analyzes disability as a category of difference that, unlike gender or class, was not reordered by the socialist state. It argues that disability reconfigured motherhood as a political institution under state socialism and shows that a child's disability permitted women to become politically disobedient subjects. Disability allowed women who were responsible for their children's overcoming disability to make demands on the state and criticize it for the lack of sufficient accommodations and resources. At the same time, the article highlights the violence embedded in the relationship between a disabled son and his mother.

Keywords: disability, memoirs, mother, Poland, socialism

Polish disability memoirs published in the 1970s and 1980s serve as a testament to the "familialization" (*urodzinnienie*) of disability under state socialism in Poland. The narratives in such memoirs reveal that mothers should be the main managers of their child's rehabilitation process. They, not the doctors, were the key to their child's overcoming their disability. This article analyzes two disability memoirs written by mothers of sons with disabilities—*Syn! Będzie szczęśliwa* (Son! She will be happy) by Eugenia Chajęcka, published in 1988,¹ and *Los w rękach twoich* (Your destiny is in your hands) by Anna Domańska, published in 1973.² The two works offer a yet unexamined perspective on motherhood and disability in socialist Poland and testify to the tension between a mother's subjectivity and her disabled son's subjectivity. Because the institutionalization of children with physical disabilities was not very common in socialist Poland,³ mothers had to guide their children to a "productive" life within the space of the home. Moreover, the memoirs reveal that what might be thought of as a benevolent practice and expression of motherly love and commitment—rehabil-

itation—masks “curative violence” perpetrated in the name of love and sacrifice for a child. “Curative violence,” a term introduced by disability studies scholar Eunjung Kim, reminds us that a cure might involve coercion and pain and is often perceived as a prerequisite for social belonging.⁴ From this perspective, the home itself becomes a space of authorized and invisible violence. In this article, I examine the experiences of mothers of children with disabilities in socialist Poland, and the ways in which they constructed their memoirs and defined their relationships with their sons as inherently violent.

Disabled people’s rehabilitation seemed to be a matter of national significance in socialist Poland. In 1951, Wiktor Dega, the cocreator of the *Polska szkoła rehabilitacji* (Polish school of rehabilitation),⁵ wrote the medical brochure *Kalekie dziecko* (The impaired child). In this brochure, he insisted that it was a mother’s duty to rehabilitate her child for the sake of the newly established socialist nation, which needed a labor force: “even an invalid is capable of working with full efficiency.”⁶ In 1984, experts on disability from the Polish Academy of Sciences openly stated that parents were obliged to rehabilitate their disabled children.⁷ Furthermore, these same experts asserted that the Polish Constitution defined rehabilitation as a “civic duty” of adult people with disabilities.⁸ It was probably the post war reconstruction that demanded the recovery of disabled people’s able-bodiedness. In other words, disability was synonymous with a temporary loss of able-bodiedness. This understanding of disability excluded people with intellectual, mental, or developmental disabilities. When Dega and the experts from the Polish Academy of Sciences wrote about disability, they meant people with physical disabilities, whose disabilities could be remediated through prosthesis or rehabilitation, and sensory disabilities, which could be normalized through adaptation or surgeries. The impossibility of curing an intellectual or developmental disability was, probably, the reason behind its silencing.

The politics of rehabilitation must have been influenced by the socialist investment in hygiene and health too. In her history of health and illness in Polish villages during the socialist period, Ewelina Szpak writes extensively about efforts to “teach” Polish citizens the rules of taking care of one’s health.⁹ Undoubtedly, this socialist “sanitary regime”¹⁰ exacerbated the violent desire for “a future without disability”¹¹ that permeates both memoirs and plays out on and through the individual bodies of the sons of the texts’ authors.

Recently there has been an upsurge in scholarship on women’s social and political positions and experiences under state socialism in Eastern Europe, including Poland, and almost all of it pays attention to motherhood and women’s obligation to have children.¹² Many historians and cultural critics attest that motherhood remained a defining and, equally important, expected condition for women behind the Iron Curtain. However, none of the most recent scholarship pays attention to mothers whose children were disabled. Was their experience different from those of mothers whose children were nondisabled? What sort of demands and expectations were imposed upon them? If motherhood signaled the future of the nation, what did it mean to be the mother of a disabled child in a state that envisioned an able-bodied utopia?

The analysis of Eugenia Chajęcka’s and Anna Domańska’s disability memoirs allows me to argue that motherhood in socialist Poland was understood in terms of

the mother's commitment to her child overcoming disability. Anna Domańska was a stay-at-home mom with a law diploma who later on worked on deaf issues. In 1966, before she published her memoir, she coauthored with Maria Góralówna, a doctor specialized in audiology, a sort of self-help book entitled *Niestyszące dziecko w rodzinie* (A nonhearing child in the family), which offered advice on how to raise a deaf child. The book's subtitle, *Rady dla matek* (Advice for mothers),¹³ indicates that the socialist politics of rehabilitation was gendered. Her son and the protagonist of the memoir, Michał Domański, was a successful deaf athlete. Eugenia Chajęcka had a diploma in economics who worked as a clerk. Her memoir focused on her son Andrzej Chajęcki's rehabilitation and academic career as a PhD in law. As much as Chajęcka's and Domańska's willingness to help their children become able-bodied might be the result of traditional Polish understandings of what it meant to be a "good mother" as well as individual choices, it was also a result of intense social and political pressure to rehabilitate children with disabilities.

The 1970s and 1980s, when the two memoirs were published, were times of social and political unrest in Poland punctuated by a period of relative stability during the Gierek era (mostly the early and mid-1970s). Bloody strikes coupled with workers' deaths in the north of Poland inaugurated the 1970s and culminated in changes within the Polish United Workers' Party, most notably the arrival of a new party secretary in December of 1970—Edward Gierek. In 1976 notable Polish intellectuals such as Jerzy Andrzejewski, Jacek Kuroń, and Stanisław Barańczak established an important dissident organization, Komitet obrony robotników (Workers' defense committee). *Solidarność* (Solidarity), the workers' trade union instrumental in taking down the entire socialist system in Poland, started in 1980, and in 1981 martial law¹⁴ was introduced. Yet none of these events are mentioned in the two memoirs. Perhaps, censorship would not allow this. However, it might also have been a decision of the authors—maybe from their perspective these political and social events did not have much to do with the already difficult situation of people with disabilities in socialist Poland. But as I show in my article, by describing the failures of the rehabilitation processes and expressing frustration with the state's disability policies the two authors participated, similarly to other social groups involved in protests and dissident groups, in articulating their disappointment in the state.

The examples of Dega's brochure, as well as Domańska's and Chajęcka's memoirs, show that under state socialism in Poland the desire for "a future without disability" was culturally and politically constructed and reinforced. Disability studies scholar Alison Kafer writes that "disabled people are continually being written out of the future, rendered as the sign of the future no one wants."¹⁵ Rehabilitation thus held the promise for a future unburdened with disability. Even though Kafer writes in a US context, her words also relate to Polish state socialism. Applying the theories of American disability studies scholarship to the Polish socialist context suggests that ableism, an idea that life—individual and social—is always better without disability, cuts across ideological and political divisions. It disrupts the binary framework that organizes the world into locations behind and outside the Iron Curtain. Disability, in other words, destabilizes geographical topographies and forces us to think of other, more subtle lines of division. And yet, my article shows that while the commitment to

ableism connects the so-called Western societies and Polish socialist society, the Polish socialist management of disability via family and, in particular, the mother differed from the Anglophone one, which, to a greater extent, relied on institutionalization.

Disability Memoirs in Socialist Poland

Polish publishing houses did not publish many disability memoirs in the early years of socialism. At the same time, disability and the overcoming of disability frequently functioned as metaphors for rebuilding the country in 1950s and 1960s literature for young readers.¹⁶ In many popular texts directed at young readers, protagonists were often faced with the task of regaining able-bodiedness. These attempts usually ended successfully, and young protagonists entered adulthood as able-bodied citizens ready to build the socialist state. The silencing of the lived experience of disability and its simultaneous employment as a literary device might not have been completely accidental. When disability memoirs started to appear in the late 1960s,¹⁷ it became clear that the image of children and teenagers overcoming disabilities in the literature of the previous decade did not find confirmation in reality. Disability memoirs were authored by men and women and discussed both congenital and acquired disabilities such as blindness, deafness, problems with walking, and polio. They collectively pointed to the failure of rehabilitation. It is important to stress that disability memoirs do not form a homogenous corpus of writing, and they differ thematically and aesthetically. However, to a certain degree all of them politicize, even if unintentionally, the experience of having a disability and indicate the uneven distribution of rights and resources in socialist Poland.

Irena Kowalczyk, the author of *Poza granicą skargi* (Beyond the possibility of grievance) (1974), openly accused the socialist system of transforming disabled people into what Giorgio Agamben calls "bare life."¹⁸ "I cannot be counted among the living, because I do not have equal rights. I am not dead either, for even if I cannot move by myself, I keep breathing."¹⁹ Even though in this and other fragments of her memoir she clearly expresses her despair and accuses the socialist state of abandoning and disfranchising disabled people, no one, including herself, the state, and dissident groups, counted her as a political dissident. Perhaps what made it difficult to label her as one was both the autobiographical form of her writing and that as a disabled woman she did not fit the image of a dissident. Her text lacks evidence that she was aware of the disability rights movement that was quickly developing at the time in Western Europe and the United States.²⁰ Therefore, it seems that her politicized identity was the result of both a socialist struggle for emancipation that she knew from home—her father was an active member of the party—and her disabled embodiment. While her memoir does not shy away from criticizing the state and demanding rights, she was not the only one who did this. For example, *Salamandra* (Salamander) by Elżbieta Łubińska²¹ and Maria Dzięgielewska's *Na przekór losowi* (Against the fate)²² discuss the violation of disabled women's reproductive rights and their difficult life conditions: poverty, lack of medicine, difficulties accessing education, and societal prejudice. As a result, disability memoirs testified not only to the violation of the human rights of disabled

people in socialist Poland, but they also revealed that there was no easily accessible welfare state and healthcare system for selected populations. Moreover, looking at Polish socialism from the perspective of disability sheds new light on population politics: while there has been, especially recently, much written on "polonizing" the population, for example, the expulsion of Germans and Jews from postwar Poland,²³ there is relatively little on other attempts to refashion populations, including rehabilitation and disability politics. Attention to disability thus allows us to rewrite the history of Polish socialism and invites us to think of the Polish socialist state as a rehabilitative regime.

Despite the fact that disability life-writing authors presented a significant critique against the state, the state allowed their texts to be published. Perhaps, as I argue in relation to Domańska's and Chajęcka's memoirs, disability was considered neither a significant experience nor an interesting topic for a wider audience—at least under late socialism, since the early decades did not offer many disability accounts. To a certain extent, the fact that disabled people's highly politicized writings were not recognized as dissident documents by people involved in dissident movements might suggest that the state was, in fact, correct—disabled people's memoirs and experiences did not stir much interest and thus seemed "safe" to publish.

The two works analyzed in this article both confirm and depart from my description of disability memoirs in socialist Poland. What is important is that they were not written by disabled people themselves and thus cannot serve as testaments to the emergence of disabled identity. But similarly to other disability memoirs, they offered a critique of the state. These are the only two memoirs written by the mothers of disabled children I identified in my research, and they shed light on a different experience of motherhood under socialism. The two authors share a similar approach to rehabilitation and adopt similar writing techniques, which allows for an examination of the nexus of motherhood and disability.

Maternal Speech

In the disability memoirs I analyze in this article, fathers are absent. Chajęcka's husband left for the United States at the beginning of the war and never returned. She had to raise their two children on her own. Domańska's husband did not leave; however, she was the one who took care of their deaf son and managed his rehabilitation. In their texts, they focus on the work of rehabilitation, which became their main activity. Chajęcka is, in fact, a mother to a daughter and a son, but her text discusses almost exclusively her relationship with her younger child—Andrzej. In order to emphasize their efforts and present themselves as devoted mothers and, perhaps, partake of the myth of the Mother Pole,²⁴ Chajęcka and Domańska erase both the male figure and other women's roles, such as wife or worker. These multiple erasures are the key to establishing one dominant identity: that of a good mother. The absence of men or the attempt to remove them from the narrative, the way Domańska does, and the silence surrounding their remaining occupations and interests imply that a mother of a disabled child commits fully to her child and has only one goal: her son's overcoming of his disability.

A child's disability reconfigures the dominant model of femininity promoted by the state. It allows women who are responsible for their children overcoming disability to make demands upon a state and criticize it for a lack of sufficient accommodations and resources required during the rehabilitation process. A child's disability creates space for them to become disobedient subjects with political demands in a state that attempts to make everyone "politically subordinate."²⁵ What makes their voice heard and, more importantly, legible is motherhood. They can enter the public realm as mothers of disabled sons advocating for better healthcare and access to rehabilitation and education.²⁶

Maternal rights became a mode of participation in public life and disability life-writing made up one part of that movement. Renata Hryciuk writes that "the hunger marches organized in the city of Łódź in the summer of 1981 could be considered one of the first attempts at making use of maternal capital in the Polish context."²⁷ I would add that the memoirs discussed here, published in 1973 and 1988, should be considered part of the history of women's struggle and mobilization in socialist Poland. They provide proof of how mothers of disabled children used memoirs as an avenue for protest. A focus on mothers who cared for disabled children makes clear that disability determined modes of engagement with politics. Perhaps, these women lacked time and possibilities to attend protests; it might have been easier for them to write memoirs and in this way express their frustration. I would argue that disability memoirs published in the early 1970s, at the time when other social groups were involved in strikes, allowed disabled people to articulate their own frustrations and disillusionment with the socialist system in a manner accessible to them. Engagement with the public is, very often, a question of access, and while attending protests might not have been possible for disabled people and their caretakers, writing might have been.

A further sanctification of motherhood that ultimately enables mothers of disabled children to claim a public voice (because they are above reproach) can be seen in the absence of mothers' sexuality in the memoirs. Chajęcka and Domańska follow a similar pattern here and do not discuss sexuality. Both the absence of male figures and no mention of close female friends complicate the possibilities of experiencing sexual or erotic pleasures for a mother.²⁸ Sexual pleasure, though, would indicate that her son's well-being is not the only thing that occupies her. Additionally, a happy mother and/or a sexually fulfilled mother in Polish culture—due to the similarity between the Mother Pole and Mary²⁹—has no voice.

Maternal Impressions

Both memoirs open with descriptions of giving birth. Chajęcka recounts that the first words she heard from a doctor when waking up after the labor were: "Son! She will be happy."³⁰ The first line in Domańska's memoir is, "He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth; he will be very happy."³¹ The striking resemblance between both beginnings indicates the closeness of the two projects. By providing the "origin story," they remind readers that they did not produce their children's disability. They gave birth to

healthy, able-bodied children. And that is why the birth is presented in both accounts as a happy event—it refers to the time *without* disability. The present is filled with nostalgia for the lost, nondisabled bodies, whereas the future remains uncertain and is tainted by the prospect of disability that stubbornly might not go away—despite the attempts to rehabilitate both sons. Nevertheless, rehabilitation is a practice directed toward the future. It implies that the future will arrive and that it can be experienced without disability, for the only desirable future is the one unmarked by disability.³²

Therefore, the narratives focus on rehabilitation—a corporeal practice that often requires bodily contact—which might be seen as continuation of giving birth to able-bodied children. If women are responsible for securing the future of the nation, and if women under state socialism in Poland were pressured to have children,³³ then the rehabilitation they put their sons through might suggest that the function of rehabilitation is to fix the partial failure of reproduction. Rehabilitation might also symbolize rebirth. As a consequence, the continuing rehabilitation prolongs the sons' dependence on the mothers. It is important that images of disabled children dependent on their mothers usually feature boys, and not girls, suggesting that dependence itself is gendered.

Mothers' bodies are not the sources of their sons' disabilities; conversely, mothers do what they can to recover their children's able-bodiedness. Because only women are capable of reproducing, only mothers can rehabilitate their children—undo disability—and the two exist in close relations. What the two women could not prevent was their children acquiring disabilities: Domańska's three-year-old son became deaf after a bomb explosion during World War II, and Chajęcka's son contracted polio at summer camp when he was thirteen.

The authors assert that both boys were extremely healthy and grew fast before acquiring disabilities, and thus their disabilities were not their mothers' fault. Chajęcka provides many details concerning her son's successes in sports before contracting polio,³⁴ which contrast with the further descriptions of his disability and thus are supposed to emphasize the "unfairness" of disability. In other words, "maternal impressions"³⁵—women's ability to imprint their fears, desires, and experiences onto the fetus—do not mark their children's bodies; war crimes and the outbreak of disease left their sons disabled.

For women with disabled children rehabilitation constituted a house-related duty. Katarzyna Wiślicz-Stańczak and Piotr Perkowski comment that the "Polish People's Republic was unanimous that women were overburdened by work—both at home and outside."³⁶ The labor of rehabilitation was a third, unpaid type of work performed mainly by women. In Chajęcka's memoir, a community of women from different generations performed the labor necessary to care for the disabled Andrzej. Chajęcka lived with her mother, a maid who had lived with them for most of her life, and an able-bodied daughter, all of whom worked to rehabilitate Andrzej.³⁷ Although Andrzej spent some time at various hospitals and sanatoriums both in Poland and Western Germany, these women divided the care work at home. Rehabilitation became a part of their "domestic" (and unpaid) labor; however, Chajęcka never thinks about it in these terms. Rehabilitation shapes bodies, and in Chajęcka's and Domańska's texts it is managed and experienced predominantly domestically and is interwoven with other house-related activities and duties.

Rehabilitation as primarily the mother's task highlights that women's emancipation was not a finished project in socialist Poland; or, as Magdalena Grabowska put it, "the socialist gender revolution was incomplete, largely because the regime's commitment to equality was quite limited."³⁸ The authorities in socialist Poland understood the question of women's emancipation as both an issue of ideology and an additional labor force. After 1956 the commitment to ideology lessened even further. Women's duty was to bear and rear healthy, nondisabled children, and if at some point their children acquired disabilities, they had to rehabilitate them. In 1951, Wiktor Dega wrote that a mother might be able to recover her child's lost able-bodiedness if she "understands [doctor's advice] and dutifully and patiently exercises with the child," and adds "in this simple way she can erase the flaw."³⁹ Even though Dega published his brochure *Kalekie dziecko* (The impaired child) in the early 1950s, his understanding of disability as a "flaw" continued into the 1970s and 1980s, as did the state's politics of relegating disability and rehabilitation to the domestic realm.⁴⁰

In the Name of Love

Chajęcka's memoir openly criticizes the state for failing to provide adequate accommodations for her disabled son. She details numerous problems with acquiring an apartment that would accommodate Andrzej, corruption of city clerks who did not want to give permission to change apartments, difficulties with getting the Ministry of Domestic Commerce's permission to buy a typewriter and a special wheelchair for him, trouble receiving the passports they needed to go to a hospital in Western Germany, and lack of medicine and medical equipment in Polish hospitals and sanatoriums. The fact that the memoir was published signals that the state-supported Main Office of Control of the Press, Publications, and Shows did not oppose its publication. Perhaps, disability was deemed insignificant enough to allow the publication of a text that criticized the state. Nevertheless, it is clear that a mother had the right to speak on behalf of a disabled child and occupy critical positions toward the state if she defended the child. Chajęcka's disability memoir did not function as a critique of the state in general, as she never extended her criticisms beyond disability issues. Disability, then, offered a specific way of discussing the state critically without making larger claims.

Domańska is not as generous in her critical commentary of the state as Chajęcka. She focuses mainly on one aspect of her son's life: education, or rather the problems of its accessibility for a deaf child. She also puts an emphasis on family relations and the familial practices of solving problems without seeking the state's involvement. In most of her narrative, the state is almost absent, as if the question of disability was solely a mother's and a family matter—and thus sometimes the memoir reads as if the location and the political situation of Poland at the time did not bear any relevance to her and her son's experiences. She renders the state dismissible, which, politically, is not a neutral gesture.

Domańska recalls visiting doctors and their advice that she wait until her son reached seven years of age, and that maybe he would start hearing again. Suffice to say, they did not offer any rehabilitation plans, and she had to seek help on her own

terms. When she found a school with dormitories for deaf children, she still decided to keep her son at home, and it seems like no one pressured her to choose otherwise. Ultimately, she devised for him a special rehabilitation plan and taught him to read lips and speak. She is, perhaps without knowing, an "oralist"; she believes that a deaf person should learn to read lips and speak instead of learning a sign language. By ceaselessly correcting his pronunciation, she was the one—in opposition to the medical establishment, which was not interested in finding "a cure" for Michał—who pathologized his difference and wanted it erased as much as possible. She describes hours, days, months, and years of arduous training, and sends him to school for non-deaf children. She is proud when she says that people who meet him for the first time think he is a foreigner because of his accent.⁴¹ Consequently, the mother trains him to be one of the "able disabled,"⁴² and he manages to pass as an able-bodied person, for despite his mother's hopes he does not regain hearing.

Sport also allowed Michał to pass as an able-bodied person. As a child Michał started skiing and later joined the athletic team in his town. Soon he competed at the national and international level with other deaf athletes. Michael Rembis argues that modern disabled sport "offers an excellent opportunity to enrich our understanding of passing"⁴³ and adds that excelling in sport for disabled people allows them to "enter the ranks of the 'normal.'"⁴⁴ Sport, in other words, becomes a means of normalization of a disabled subject.⁴⁵ According to his mother, Michał was "normal" in every way except his inability to hear, which, ultimately, did not affect him. Sport enabled him to "transcend impairment"⁴⁶ and granted him first-class citizenship. Success in sport, similarly to reading lips, contributed to the symbolic erasure of his disability.

Domańska criticizes the use of sign language and believes that Michał needed to learn to speak and read lips. Douglas Baynton, an American historian, explains that in the United States "opponents of sign language believed that its use discouraged the learning of oral communication skills; hearing parents, eager to believe their deaf children could learn to function like hearing people, supported its proscription."⁴⁷ Domańska correspondingly believed that the use of Polish Sign Language (PSL) would delay her son's development and decrease his chances of receiving a "good" education. During the conversation with a headmaster of a school where she wanted to send her son, she said that she would not put Michał in a school for deaf children: "Children taught in special schools, who live among other deaf children, use sign language, which is a simplified method of communication that lacks many expressions and structures and thus does not require as much effort as spoken language."⁴⁸ Domańska, not surprisingly, did not know PSL, and it is unclear how she arrived at her conclusions, yet the fact that Michał used spoken language enabled her to say to him: "You live a full, normal life, you do not feel worse than other people who can hear. It is possible to state that you are truly rehabilitated."⁴⁹ In other words, sign language obstructed a chance of living a full life and posed an obstacle to rehabilitation, whereas the oral method was almost synonymous with overcoming deafness.

What is important, though, is that while trying to convince Michał's professors in the school of medicine that he could be a successful doctor she gave examples of deaf doctors practicing in the United Kingdom and California who also speak and read lips. Oralism then appears to be a transnational phenomenon unrestricted by the

Iron Curtain. Equally important, socialism in Poland did not reconfigure the dominant cultural construction of deafness that conceived it as a biological flaw in need of curing. Deafness did not function as a mark of culture or identity; rather, it was pathologized. While state socialism attempted to unfix the gender and class orders, disability remained an uncontested category of difference that had to be ameliorated not through denaturalization and reconceptualization, but through the erasure of rehabilitation.

Although Domańska in her memoirs does not address the state explicitly, she nevertheless challenges it by providing the help she believes her son needs on her own. As a result, she presents the state and its services as superfluous—she can do without them and is confident that what she does is, in fact, better. In this way, she discredits socialism with its promise of a good life by refusing its assistance. The mother replaces the state and holds power; she knows better and exercises her will uninterrupted. She never asks the son if he wants to learn to read lips, she never considers teaching him PSL, and she assumes that reading lips and teaching him to speak are the best options. She does not explain in the text why she makes the assumption that PSL is not an adequate means of communication. She consults her husband sporadically about their son, and at some point he tells her that she herself should make a decision if she wants to send Michał to a school for deaf children.⁵⁰ She decides against it, even though in her description of the school she says: “I saw big and small children. All of them seem smart and curious; just like my son; they did not seem to be sad or missing home. They were happy and lively like every normal child.”⁵¹ She describes friendly interactions with the headmaster and the teachers and it seems that they all truly care for the children they teach. Despite this, she does not want to send Michał there: “I imagined home without Michał . . . So empty! He is so small! He comes to me with everything, he looks at me with trustful eyes.”⁵² In other words, she does not suggest that the institution is the site of violence. She wants to keep him, because she cannot bear the idea of being separated from him.

Rather, it is the mother who exercises violence toward her son and forces him to use the oral method, which possibly affected his life in ways that are difficult to uncover. Domańska describes meticulously the way in which she taught Michał to speak, but the reader does not know how he felt and what he went through while trying—for many years—to learn reading lips. Perhaps, using PSL would have saved him time and difficulties and, maybe even more importantly, would have provided him a chance to establish bonds with a community and to form a disability identity. The inclusion into the able-bodied community did not come easily, as Domańska’s descriptions of the university where Michał studied suggest, and it also resulted in his complete isolation from deaf and disability communities. While there was no disability rights movement under socialism in Poland and the state did not encourage the forming of a separate disability community, there was a Polish Association of the Deaf established in 1946 in Łódź and schools for deaf children that, perhaps, would have given him a chance to meet other deaf people and provided him with an additional—beyond the familial—sense of belonging.⁵³ Eunjung Kim explains that one of the ways in which violence against disabled people operates is “denying a place for disability and illness as different ways of living,”⁵⁴ which Domańska’s text demonstrates. At the

same time, Domańska does not conceive of her actions as violent; she sees them as love. The violence of rehabilitation and isolation from the disability community are made invisible here and perpetrated in the name of love and care. Maternal impressions might not mark disabled bodies, but maternal domination does.

Ultimately, though, Domańska's project of separating herself and her son from the state failed as a result of deep disappointment with the higher education system (her son could not continue studying medicine even though he was a good student and she intervened many times on his behalf with the school authorities). The end of the book discusses her transformation into a disability activist, which results in maintaining a closer and consistent contact with the state. She starts working for an association of deaf people and writes about deaf issues in Poland. It is crucial to note that Domańska, as a disability activist, is engaged primarily with the medical model of disability and, as mentioned earlier, promotes oralism in her work. Advocacy here protects able-bodiedness,⁵⁵ for the goal of Domańska and other advocates that work with her is to normalize and rehabilitate deaf subjects through oralism.

Similarly to Domańska, Chajęcka does not think of rehabilitation as leaving a violent mark on her son's body. She hardly discusses it despite the fact that her son spent three years (in and out) in a state-run institution for disabled children. In the beginning she was skeptical about putting him in an institution: "The first impression was not good. The sanatorium was located in a two-story old building that was not adapted to the needs of disabled children;"⁵⁶ however, upon meeting the main doctor and director she changed her mind: "I knew my son would be in good hands. I felt he would receive good care here and that this 'angel of goodness' [this is how she refers to the doctor] would do everything to restore Andrzej to his lost health and strength."⁵⁷ But the descriptions of rehabilitation itself—exercises and treatments—depict pain and suffering. Chajęcka writes: "This treatment was incredibly painful, and thus the room was full of screaming and crying. The physiotherapists did not care and kept working despite screaming and crying."⁵⁸ She mentions that other treatments were "not very pleasant" either.⁵⁹ Ultimately, she depicts the institution as a place of suffering, even though she does not challenge the importance of rehabilitation itself. Instead, both Chajęcka and Domańska agree that home provides a violence-free space.

What differentiates these two narratives is that Chajęcka insists that the state recognize disability as a matter of public policy and intervention, and she might have wanted to use her memoir as yet another form to remind her readers of that; in contrast, Domańska attempts to make disability a family matter as much as possible and separate it from the state. The act of separation is a gesture of dismissal of the state. At the same time, it seems that the state does not intervene in Domańska's case. A reading of Domańska's text reveals that living under socialism with a disability, at least for the mother of a disabled child, might not have always consisted of constant negotiation of the political terrain and avoidance of political pressures. Moreover, Domańska's memoir testifies that socialism and state politics did not permeate every aspect of one's activity. The comparative analysis of Chajęcka's and Domańska's memoirs show different ways of engaging and disengaging with the state. Consequently, attention to disability, similarly to gender, exposes multifarious experiences of living under socialism.

Narrative Power

Although both authors employ different strategies for discussing disability and acting on behalf of their disabled sons, their narratives depict the processes of forming political subjects—mothers who critique the state and demand changes in the ways it caters to the disabled population. The two sons do not advocate for themselves, but are advocated for. Andrzej and Michał support their mothers in their endeavors, and it appears that they agree with the methods the two women use. Perhaps this lack of consulting the sons operates as another way of privileging the Mother Pole trope. Or at least the two authors present their sons as agreeing with but not particularly involved in the matters of their rehabilitation and advocacy. Consequently, the mothers manage the rehabilitation processes and, what is equally important, the texts.

The narrative strategies used by Chajęcka and Domańska question the very definition of advocacy and self-advocacy and, perhaps more importantly, the singularity and subjectivity of the subject. Chajęcka, in her memoirs, often uses the pronoun “we.” When her son decides to study law, she says “we chose law”;⁶⁰ when he finds a job she says “we found a job”;⁶¹ when Andrzej manages to pass a difficult exam she writes “the exam was an important event for us”;⁶² when he has some difficulties but manages to find a solution she phrases it as “life helped us find the solution”;⁶³ and when Andrzej’s advisor at the university suggests he does PhD work she writes “we did not take him seriously.”⁶⁴ The usage of the pronoun “we” is so frequent that the reader forgets about it; in other words, “we” becomes transparent and even naturalized, for it refers to a mother-son relationship. It does not mean that Chajęcka never uses the pronoun “I” or “he” when she describes her son, but to a very large extent her narrative depends on “we.” “We” helps her, undeniably, to present herself and her son as a unit. Her son’s polio, and his dependency on her, allows Chajęcka to create and use “we.” In other words, the difference disability entails facilitates a unity and intimacy.

“We,” however, reveals much more than just that: it challenges the notion of a singular and autonomous subject, both disabled and able-bodied, and thus points to the erasure of individualism for the mother and the child. It serves as a reminder that in socialist Poland disability was embedded in a family and experienced through family and in this way departed from the Anglophone social model of disability. The social model of disability (formulated in the 1970s in the United Kingdom by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation)⁶⁵ understands disability as a result of social oppression and exclusion. It advocates for accommodations and the removal of societal barriers; and it assumes the individual to be an autonomous agent restricted by society and thus family matters are not its primary concern. Moreover, one of the main demands of the union was deinstitutionalization, while in socialist Poland institutionalization, as these disability memoirs illustrate, was not a main issue. It was rather a “familialization” of disability. The example of oralism I discussed above shows that ideas about disability traveled the West-East border; however, the issues of institutionalization and, more broadly, ways of managing disabled populations differed. Therefore, attention to disability allows us to rewrite the history of Polish socialism and the Polish family, while the analysis of socialist-era Polish literature provides tools to destabilize the dominant, Anglophone understandings of disability.

Domańska relies on a different narrative strategy, comparably disquieting, to question the autonomy of her disabled son. In her memoir, she often describes events in which her son took part and where she herself was not present, such as athletic contests. Even though she was not there, she uses phrases such as, "He was so tense, his thoughts went silent";⁶⁶ "He felt lonely. The pain in his leg was sharp. Can he run tomorrow, overcome the pain . . . ? He has to stop despairing, he has to stop to think about this, he needs to think about something nice and safe . . . about home."⁶⁷ In other words, the narrative enables the reader to conclude that Domańska claims she had access to her son's thoughts and emotions at particular moments when he was not around and, sometimes, in a different country. I call her technique "imaginary identification."

One explanation for this technique is that he told her what he thought and experienced and she transcribed it into the text; however, why did she not, even once, introduce a phrase that would make that clear? She claims that she understands her son better than anyone else and that they taught themselves to guess their moods and feelings just by looking at each other.⁶⁸ She adds that when he was still a little boy he apprehended everything she said even if he did not know particular words: "He did not know all the words I used, he could not read lips that well yet, but he always understood what I meant, for I spoke only to him."⁶⁹ That might explain why she uses the phrases quoted above—to emphasize the oneness of mother and son. At the same time, in these descriptions of Michał's thoughts and experiences she assumes the role of an omniscient narrator and writes about him using the third-person singular. In other words, her memoir adopts the genre of literary fiction and thus Michał becomes a fictional protagonist. Ultimately, "imaginary identification" results in a change of literary genres that implies the negation of her son's identity and subjectivity. Crucially, it negates her autonomy too.

However, both memoirs contain moments when the sons' voices are directly inserted. Near the end of her text Chajęcka includes postcards and letter fragments that Andrzej sent her when he was abroad in Germany, where he received a fellowship to study law for a few months. In one of the letters (postcards?) he writes: "I was invited to give a speech and write an article about Polish criminal law. I am very happy about it. It is a big honor and only some fellows are asked to do this. I am afraid about giving a speech in German; particularly, about Q&As. But I have to try. Luckily, I brought some materials that I can use. Besides, they have all the Polish law journals and academic books here. There is so little time, though. The time flies."⁷⁰ Similarly, in Domańska's book the reader encounters several pages from Michał's diary in which he writes about the beginning of the school year, meeting new colleagues and professors: "I went to the inauguration of the academic year. There were students in front of the academy's gate as well as on the sidewalk and on the steps to St. Anna's Church. Everyone is very young and excited. They talked and observed what was going on in the street. The cars approached bringing professors who all looked very serious."⁷¹ In these few pages, Michał does more reporting than reflecting, yet it is obvious that he wrote about his own life too, even if it was his mother who published the memoir. What is important is that the inclusion of the sons' writings disrupts the singularity of the authorial voice and the presumed unity between mothers and their children. But the sudden and brief

appearance of the sons' writings reminds us that, ultimately, these two narratives are testaments to the marginalization of disabled voices. From this perspective, the two texts constitute anti-disability memoirs, for they negate identities and subjectivities of disabled subjects by the use of the pronoun "we" in Chajęcka's book and Domańska's claim that she knew what her son thought and felt even if she was not around him for an extended period of time.

The inclusion of the postcards and diary fragments might have been intended as a tool of legitimating the mothers' texts and attempting to introduce the voices of their sons. But the attempts fail—the postcards and diary fragments are short and, obviously, contextualized by the mothers. What this gesture of illusionary "inclusion" reveals, though, is that even when a disabled subject is *allowed* to speak his speech does not matter, for it is used solely as proof of the mother's words and remains managed by her. Ultimately, the two memoirs testify to different forms of violence perpetrated in the name of love: while Domańska's insistence on teaching her son the oral method exemplifies an ableist violence that has material effects on Michał's life, the negation of his voice and Andrzej's voice in Chajęcka's book represents symbolic and discursive violence. Disabled subjects are made to live and rehabilitated, but the texts render their voices superfluous. The narrative power belongs to the mothers.

Conclusion

Syn! Będzie szczęśliwa (Son! She will be happy) and *Los w rękach twoich* (Your destiny is in your hands) emphasize the essential role of mothers in the process of overcoming disability in socialist Poland. Crucially, the two texts demonstrate that a disabled child cannot escape a mother's violence. The mother figure constitutes the main repository of violence directed toward her child and thus proves that power and domination in the Polish socialist state did not circulate in solely one direction, but was, in fact, multidirectional. From this perspective, disability memoirs not only constitute literary texts, but also function as important historical materials that can be used to look anew at the history of the Polish family or dissidents. Disability functions as a topic and category of analysis that raises questions about the terms of engagement with regard to the public, the politics of rehabilitation, and the nexus of gender and disability politics under state socialism. Moreover, attending to Polish socialist experiences of disability uncovers similarities and differences with Anglophone understandings of disability. It shows that disability requires us to think differently about the divisions between what is deemed socialist and what is deemed not socialist, what is deemed Western and what is deemed Eastern European.

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◆ Notes

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1. Eugenia Chajęcka, *Syn! Będzie szczęśliwa* [Son! She will be happy] (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1988).

2. Anna Domańska, *Los w rękach twoich* [Your destiny is in your hands] (Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1975).

3. Institutionalization was not very popular in postwar Poland, for ideological reasons—disability was imagined as predominantly a family's concern—but also for practical ones—post-1945 Poland lacked the infrastructure and medical establishment to take care of its disabled population. Many of disability memoirs I have read indicated that their authors spent some time in and out of institutions, but rarely for very long periods, and that they primarily lived at home with their families.

4. Eunjung Kim, *Curative Violence: Rehabilitating Disability, Gender, and Sexuality in Modern Korea* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

5. The idea of the "Polish school of rehabilitation" developed after the end of World War II. It put emphasis not only on medical rehabilitation and bringing back one's physical capacities, but also on social rehabilitation. Wiktor Dega and Aleksander Hulek, the leading figures of the Polish school of rehabilitation, understood work as one of the key elements of rehabilitation.

6. Wiktor Dega, *Kalekie dziecko* [The impaired child] (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1951), 7.

7. *Sytuacja ludzi niepełnosprawnych i stan rehabilitacji w PRL* [The situation of disabled people and the condition of rehabilitation in the Polish People's Republic] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy Ossolińskich, 1984), 83.

8. *Ibid.*, 82.

9. Ewelina Szpak, "Chory człowiek jest jak coś go boli": *Spółeczno-kulturowa historia zdrowia i choroby na wsi polskiej po 1945 r.* ["One is sick when something hurts": The social and cultural history of health and illness in the Polish countryside after 1945] (Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 2016).

10. *Ibid.*, 76.

11. Alison Kafer, *Feminist Queer Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

12. See, among others, Malgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller, eds., *Gender Politics and Post-Communism* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Joanna Goven, "Gender and Modernism in a Stalinist State," *Social Politics* 9, no. 1 (2002): 3–28; and Joanna Mishtal, "How the Church Became the State: The Catholic Regime and Reproductive Rights in State Socialist Poland," in *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe*, ed. Jill Massino and Shana Penn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 133–151.

13. Anna Domańska and Maria Góralówna, *Niesłyszające dziecko w rodzinie: Rady dla matek* [A nonhearing child in the family: Advice for mothers] (Warsaw: Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, 1966).

14. The martial law was introduced in Poland in December 1981 and lifted in July 1983. The official reason for its introduction was the worsening economic situation of Poland; the unofficial—the regime's fear of losing power as it faced the quickly growing and independent trade union *Solidarność* (Solidarity).

15. Kafer, *Feminist Queer Crip*, 46.

16. See Jadwiga Korczakowska, *Spotkanie nad morzem* [A meeting by the sea] (Warsaw: Nasza Księgarnia, 1962); Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, *Krzak jaśminu* [The jasmine shrub] (Warsaw: Nasza Księgarnia, 1954); Krystyna Siesicka, *Beethoven i dżinsy* [Beethoven and jeans] (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1968); and Jadwiga Ruth-Charlewska, *Dziewczynka spoza szyby* [A girl behind the window] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1964).

17. I do not know why disability memoirs started to appear on a broader scale only in the late 1960s; however, in my extensive research I have not come across many disability memoirs published before 1967.

18. Giorgio Agamben, *Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 7.

19. Irena Kowalczyk, *Poza granicą skargi: Dzienniki* [Beyond the possibility of grievance: Diaries] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1974), 118.

20. See Lennard J. Davis, ed., *The Disability Studies Reader*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013); Lindsey Patterson, "Points of Access: Rehabilitation Centers, Summer Camps, and Student Life in the Making of Disability Activism, 1960–1973," *Journal of Social History* 46, no. 2 (2012): 473–499; and Michael A. Rembis, Catherine Kudlick, and Kim E. Nielsen, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

21. Elżbieta Anna Łubińska, *Salamandra* [Salamander] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1986).

22. Maria Dziegielewska, *Na przekór losowi* [Against the fate] (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1972).

23. See Marcin Zaremba, *Wielka Trwoga. Polska 1944–1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys* [A big fear. Poland 1944–1947. A common reaction to crisis] (Kraków: Znak, 2012); Jan Tomasz Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2007); Magdalena Grzebałkowska, *1945: Wojna i pokój* [1945: War and peace] (Warsaw: Agora, 2015); Piotr Osęka, *My, ludzie z Marca: Autoportret pokolenia* [We, the people of March: The autobiography of a generation] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2015).

24. The cultural construct of the Mother Pole comes from the nineteenth century, when Poland was not independent and was divided among Austria, Prussia, and Russia. The role of the Mother Pole was to rear future patriots willing to fight for the independence of the country. She is usually presented as a widow who is devoted to her children and the country. The Mother Pole carried the burden of reproducing the nation both biologically and symbolically and hence became the representative of the entire collectivity. See Sławomira Walczewska, *Damy, rycerze, feministki* [Ladies, knights, and feminists] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo eFKA, 2000).

25. Goven, "Gender and Modernism in a Stalinist State," 17.

26. During the socialist era, already in 1945, women went on strikes, usually to demand higher wages and food for their children, but also to protest against communist methods of work at factories, for example in 1945 in Łódź. These women went on strike not only as factory workers, but also as mothers and mothers who ran households. Motherhood coupled with a child's disability legitimized entering the public domain as well—publishing disability memoirs by a mother is one of the means to do so. The mother's right to express frustration or disagreement is embedded in the family or, more specifically, in the relationship she has with her children. See Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization*; and Padraic Kenney,

Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945–1950 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

27. Renata Ewa Hryciuk, "On the Disappearing Mother: Political Motherhood, Citizenship, and Neoliberalism in Poland," in *Civil Society Revised: Lessons from Poland*, ed. Kerstin Jacobsson and Elżbieta Korolczuk (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 153–175, here 157.

28. Obviously, there was a possibility of autoeroticism/pleasure, but the authors do not mention it at all.

29. See Katherine Jolluck, *Exile and Identity: Polish Women in the Soviet Union during World War II* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 90.

30. Chajęcka, *Syn! Będzie szczęśliwa*, 14. All translations by the author unless otherwise stated.

31. Domańska, *Los w rękach twoich*, 5.

32. Kafer, *Feminist Queer Crip*, 28–34.

33. An intense pro-natalist discourse pressured women to have children throughout the socialist period in Poland.

34. Chajęcka, *Syn! Będzie szczęśliwa*, 20.

35. Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 186.

36. Katarzyna Stańczak-Wislicz and Piotr Perkowski, "Kobieta w gospodarstwie domowym okresu PRL" [A woman in a household during the Polish People's Republic], in *Kobieta w gospodarstwie domowym: Ziemie polskie na tle porównawczym* [A woman in a household: Comparative study of Polish lands], ed. Grażyna Wyder (Zielona Góra: Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, 2012), 313–348, here 321.

37. It is unclear whether the maid received any money for her work; Chajęcka never discussed this.

38. Magdalena Grabowska, "Bringing the Second World War In: Conservative Revolution(s), Socialist Legacies, and Transnational Silences in the Trajectories of Polish Feminism," *Signs* 37, no. 2 (2012): 385–411, here 397.

39. Dega, *Kalekie dziecko*, 28.

40. Obviously, this does not mean that the politics toward disability were stagnant throughout the socialist period in Poland. They changed, for example, during the 1970s and 1980s, when work perhaps as much as rehabilitation was understood as a way of "normalizing" disabled subjects. However, this topic goes beyond the scope of this article.

41. Domańska, *Los w rękach twoich*, 194.

42. Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, "Introduction: Ablenationalism and the Geopolitics of Disability," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 4, no. 2 (2010): 113–125, here 118.

43. Michael Rembis, "Athlete First: A Note on Passing, Disability, and Sport," in *Disability and Passing: Blurring the Lines of Identity*, ed. Jeffrey A. Brune and Daniel J. Wilson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 111–141, here 114.

44. *Ibid.*, 116.

45. After 1962, disabled sport developed very quickly in socialist Poland and was viewed as one of the main methods of rehabilitation. Sport clubs, as they were called, were a part of workshops for disabled people. In the 1980s there were around four hundred such sport clubs, and they hired more than four hundred instructors who were graduates of university physical education and rehabilitation programs. Since the 1970s disabled sport has become increasingly professionalized, and Polish disabled athletes started to participate in national and interna-

tional competitions. Michał Domański, the son of Anna Domańska, seems to have been among the first generation of disabled athletes in socialist Poland.

46. Rembis, "Athlete First," 116.

47. Douglas Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 6.

48. Domańska, *Los w rękach twoich*, 84.

49. *Ibid.*, 181.

50. *Ibid.*, 46.

51. *Ibid.*, 47.

52. *Ibid.*, 49.

53. The Polish Association of the Deaf was established in 1946 in Łódź. It was and still is the biggest organization that works on deaf issues in Poland.

54. Kim, *Curative Violence*, 14.

55. Anne McGuire, *War on Autism: On the Cultural Logic of Normative Violence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 168.

56. Chajęcka, *Syn! Będzie szczęśliwa*, 38.

57. *Ibid.*, 39.

58. *Ibid.*, 41.

59. *Ibid.*, 41.

60. *Ibid.*, 97.

61. *Ibid.*, 167.

62. *Ibid.*, 144.

63. *Ibid.*, 138.

64. *Ibid.*, 131.

65. The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation was established by Paul Hunt, Vic Finkelstein, and Maggie and Ken Davis in the United Kingdom. It was a disability rights organization created by disabled people. In 1976 they published a very important document, *Fundamental Principles of Disability*, in which they argued that society creates disability and uses it as a tool of oppression of disabled people.

66. Domańska, *Los w rękach twoich*, 164.

67. *Ibid.*, 173.

68. *Ibid.*, 37.

69. *Ibid.*, 37.

70. Chajęcka, *Syn! Będzie szczęśliwa*, 223.

71. Domańska, *Los w rękach twoich*, 193–194.